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TEENS IN U.S. AND VIRGINIA SUPPORT ABSTINENCE

February is Abstinence Promotion Month

(RICHMOND, Va.)—Teens in Virginia and throughout the nation are receptive to messages about abstaining from sex, according to recent analysis.

Teens participating in the abstinence education programs across the country funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) are increasingly supportive of abstinence and less supportive of teen sex, according to a 2005 HHS report.

Data collected in an on-going evaluation of abstinence programs funded by the Virginia Department of Health's (VDH) Virginia Abstinence Education Initiative mirror the national findings. Students participating in the evaluation say they strongly agree that having sex as a teenager would make it harder for them to study and stay in school in the future.

"We are encouraged by the trend in support for abstinence among teens and hope that this change in attitude is reflected in behavioral change," said Gale Grant, director of the VDH Virginia Abstinence Education Initiative. "Delaying sexual activity by as few as 18 months greatly reduces a teen's risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease or having an unintended pregnancy."

According to a 2004 survey by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, less than half of the nation's high school students are sexually active even though they are bombarded with many different messages about sexuality and relationships. The VDH Virginia Abstinence Education Initiative works to create a positive environment for abstinence education by involving parents, teens, educators, health professionals, faith community workers and youth services providers. The initiative supports individuals and communities in promoting the abstinence message by providing resources such as brochures, posters and parent toolkits.

The VDH Virginia Abstinence Education Initiative Web site, www.canwait.com, provides Virginia residents with information about current topics related to abstinence education and upcoming training opportunities. It also provides information about current educational materials, local statistics and a directory of programs by locality. The site offers resources for teens, parents and partners in abstinence education. The Web site also encourages feedback from residents with online polls and a feedback link.

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